

**Board of Early Care and Learning  
Meeting Summary  
November 18, 2021**

**Attendees**

**Board Members:**

Kristy Beam, Jen Bennecke, Melissa Boekhaus, Phil Davis (Chair), Susan Harper, Joanna Hill, Kathy Howell, Kristin Morrissey, Luann Purcell, Karla Zisook

**DECAL Staff:**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Rian Ringsrud, Pam Stevens, Elisabetta Kasfir, Susan Adams, Laura Lucas, Bentley Ponder, Laura Wagner, Randy Hudgins, Ira Sudman, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Mark Waits, Catherine Broussard, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Faith Duncan, Rebecca Ellis, Shayna Funke, Kristin Goetz, Melinda Knowles, Rachale LaVoie, Barbara McWethy, Christi Moore, Sara Myers, Jill O'Meara, Martine Powe, Laura Reid, Anne Rein, April Rogers, Allison Setterlind, Angela Shelton, Marcie Singletary, Hannah Smith, Margrett Stephens, Sonja Steptoe, Robin Stevens, Diane Swift, Bridgette Washington, Liz Young

**Other Guests:**

Uzma Azhar, Hanah Goldberg, Beverly Johnson, Blanche Lamb, Maggie Reeves, Cindy Spann

At 9:06 a.m. Mr. Davis called the meeting to order and introduced new Board members Karla Zisook (4<sup>th</sup> District) and Joanna Hill (10<sup>th</sup> District). Kristy Beam rejoins the Board representing the 6<sup>th</sup> District.

The Board unanimously approved the proposed agenda and the minutes from the November 18, 2021 meeting.

DECAL leaders provided the following updates.

- Commissioner Amy Jacobs gave an update on the current projects funded by federal relief. STABLE 4ward will distribute more than \$800 million to licensed child care providers over approximately 23 months. The CAPS program will serve an additional 10,000 children and increase the Quality Rated bonus payments by 15% for each star level. The agency will also make two additional rounds of POWER payments to early learning professionals, and a broad stakeholder engagement project is underway to solicit feedback from stakeholders about how the remaining federal funds should be spent. The Commissioner also announced the Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year, LaNita Carey from Jackson Creek Academy in Lilburn and Stephanie Curington from Kings Chapel Elementary in Perry and the six finalists for Georgia's Early Childhood Educator of the Year.
- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that DECAL's expenses for the first quarter of SFY2022 are on track with the budget. He announced a rebranding of the Summer Food Service Program designed to attract sponsors and families. It is now called Happy Helpings.
- Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens updated the Board about the SHARE grants for school-age programs. CCS approved 1,382 SHARE grants to providers in 122 counties. The awards ranged from \$1,075 for family child care learning homes to \$4,300 for child care centers serving more than 200 students. CCS used the grant application process to find out what is happening in school-age care and survey the needs of providers. Grant recipients are serving 48,067 children ages 5 to 12. More than 60% of school-age teachers earn less than \$11.25 per hour, and 25% earn less than \$10.00. All SHARE grant applicants were required to participate in training about best practices in school-age care. Optional trainings on a variety of subjects were also offered. The trainings were well-attended, and more than 98% of participants rated them excellent or good. A subset of the grantees is now receiving technical assistance and coaching.
- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir described the expansion of the CAPS program. To add 10,000 children quickly, the team raised the income limit for initial entry from 50% of the State Median Income (SMI) to 85%. This is the first time since 2016 that funds have been available to raise the

income limit. To receive a scholarship, a family must meet the income limit and be in one of 12 priority groups. The income limit for the very low income priority group was also raised, from 50% of the Federal Poverty Level to 150%, the highest it has ever been. The CAPS emergency payment policies continue in effect, and the ACCESS program continues until October 2, 2022.

- Deputy Commissioner for Georgia’s Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams reported that Georgia’s Pre-K enrollment has increased over last year from 63,000 children to 72,000 children. Typically, the program serves about 60% of the four-year-old population. Last year that number was 46%. This year it is 53% and expected to rise during the school year. Ms. Adams thanked Board members for their participation in Georgia’s Pre-K week and highlighted some of the week’s activities. She reviewed some of the work funded by Georgia’s Preschool Development Grant (PDG) and introduced Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Director Laura Lucas. Ms. Lucas reviewed the findings in the PDG needs assessment related to IECMH, which include limited or no access to mental health services for infants and young children, lack of supports and resources to address challenging behavior, and the need for a credentialing program for mental health professionals who can treat young children. Ms. Lucas also reported on the progress made by the IECMH Task Force since it was convened in February 2021. The Task Force established the Georgia Association of Infant Mental Health (GA-AIMH) which will create pathways for early childhood professionals to earn IECMH endorsements and has developed or sponsored several trainings for different audiences. The Task Force is also working on policy changes that will allow mental health providers to bill for their services to young children.
- Deputy Commissioner Adam’s update ended just before the published time for the quarterly Public Comment period. Board Chair Phil Davis announced the Public Comment period and asked Interim Board Liaison Mark Waits if a member of the public was present in the Oak Conference Room to make public comment. No one was physically present to make public comment. Then Chair Davis asked if anyone had submitted public comments using the Chat functionality of GoToWebinar. Board Liaison Waits read the following comment from Beverly Johnson of Discovery Point #61 in Conyers. “Thank you, DECAL! If it wasn’t for all of you, my doors would be closed. Thank you for all being so open to talk with me any time of day during the pandemic. You all were very tangible, and totally a wonderful sounding board, a shoulder to cry on, the voice of reason and great cheerleaders. Thank you all!”
- Board Chair Davis commented how affirming it was to hear Ms. Johnson’s comment. He then returned to the board agenda.
- Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder introduced Community Outreach and Partnerships Director Laura Wagner who announced the four recipients of \$10,000 Trauma-Responsive Care Grants. Mini-grants of \$5,000 each were also awarded to support promising local practices begun under the Early Learning Leadership Collaborative Grants. Director of Research and Policy Analysis Randy Hudgins presented an overview of the stakeholder engagement project which includes surveys, focus groups, and analysis of some of the agency’s administrative data by the Urban Institute. Mr. Ponder announced that Megan Fickes joined DECAL as Director of the DECAL Early Head Start Partnership on October 18. Mr. Ponder reported that as of October 31, 2021, 92% of children with CAPS scholarships are cared for by a Quality Rated provider, and 84% of CAPS providers have achieved at least a 1-star rating. The Quality Rated team has rated more than 810 providers this year using the Temporary Alternate Rating Options (TARO). Mr. Ponder also reported on the Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement pilot, a priority of Governor Kemp. Eight providers completed the pilot and earned the endorsement benefiting from professional development; technical and financial support; and creating a growth plan that was reviewed by the Instructional Supports division.

At 10:56 a.m. Mr. Davis thanked board members and staff for their participation in the meeting and announced the date for the next board meeting, February 17, 2022. He then adjourned the meeting.